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CUBA: A SKETCH

BY M. EUGÉNIE HIBBARD

(Concluded from page 846)

THE women of Cuba, with whom so much of our interest naturally lies, are like the variable lights and shadows of the island itself (the land of contrasts and contradictions), and exhibit under personal scrutiny many admirable qualities. They are affectionate, with a love for kindred and friends almost pathetic, are anxious to stand well in your estimation, which they highly prize. They are too easily moulded to receive lasting impressions and are very susceptible to varying influences. They perform their duties gracefully and gently and with dignified slowness and never allow themselves to be flustered by "hurry," but are extremely emotional and hysterical. This is but the natural consequence of the effect upon their susceptible natures of the great strain to which they have been subjected during the closing years of eighteen hundred.

The "señoritas" (young women) when young are very attractive and often beautiful, and even those we know *are not* appear so. They seldom, if ever, appear on the streets unaccompanied and are always well and carefully dressed (though often very untidy *en casa**). Bright colors, with flowers and ornaments, are indispensable to them. They possess a poise of carriage graceful and inclined to haughtiness and a deceptive unconsciousness of manner, based on a super-consciousness of self, personal pride, and satisfaction in their appearance. These may be called distinctive signs of the *race*, and are not confined to the sex.

Compare the señorita of Southern Spain, "with handsome, bluish-black tresses carefully combed and raised up in great waves, the mantilla of tulle or lace falling back half over the forehead, like a light and mobile shadow, a flower, usually a rose, coquettishly fastened at the side of her head," with the Cuban señorita of to-day, who, exhibiting her talent for imitation, prefers the gaudily trimmed and jauntily set hat of French or American make, and we deplore, while we acknowledge she recognizes her emancipation and elevation in the status of civilization.

The women marry when very young and make faithful and obedient wives, assuming the restrictions placed upon them as obligations essential to the dignity of señoras. They are affectionate but not always wise mothers, being usually indulgent. In the management of the household a degree of familiarity exists between mistress and maids, which, though not openly defined, is so nicely adjusted that it seldom becomes objection-

* At home.

able. The mistress depends a great deal on the service rendered her, which prevents her from being too exacting, but often results in indifference.

The Cuban women are not accustomed to much exercise, and to a casual observer the impression is that everyone rides, either in his or her own carriage or in the ordinary *coche*, and the élite are to be seen in the late afternoon or early evening hours driving on the principal streets, "the Prado or Paseo." Then are the women seen at their best, smiling and bowing in the recognition of friends, glancing shyly at the foreigners, usually "Americanos," coquettishly flirting with fan or flowers, greeting with happy laughter the remarks of friends, passing and repassing each other, their spirits exhilarated with the constant movement and the sound of music, till the shades of night fall and with the disappearance of the ladies follow darkness and desertion of the Prado.

Bailes, carnivals, and fiestas are pleasant words to the people, who do so sincerely enjoy enjoyment. Fireworks are usually employed to announce the advent of a holiday. The day fireworks are a peculiar mode of celebrating a saint's day, and I first saw them used at Funchal, Madeira, on Easter Sunday, and have since concluded that the custom is of Peninsular origin. They are, however, under the blue skies and surrounded by the brilliant coloring of tropical vegetation, very disappointing. The noise no doubt appeals and makes amends.

For spontaneous, pleasure-loving people are our neighbors of the Queen of the Antilles, and it is well their religious calendars supply them with so many *fiestas*, which are strictly observed, and so few, apparently, *días de ayunos* (fast days), except those individually kept in memory of the tragic ending of a life dear to one or many in the fight for liberty.

The custom of observing the "*dia Santa*" and the "*dia nacimiento*" (day of one's saint and the day of one's birth) in the same year and sometimes in the same month is frequently confusing, but is explained by the fact that every day of the year is named as a saint's day. The name of the saint whose day is the natal day of the child is not always suitable or agreeable to the parents; for example, a child born on St. Peter's day might be called Paul in preference, and in this way he would be required by custom to observe the days of both saints. This is more complicated than the Japanese custom of observing one general anniversary for all the boys and another for the girls, which has some advantages. The number of names assumed is prohibitive for general use, two names, with two surnames, that of mother and father, being used—thus, Pedro Gonzales Llorente y Ponce; Juan Francisco O'Farrell y Chappotin, show in both instances the surnames connected by y (and), being those of

mother and father (one case shows Irish origin). It is not obligatory to use both names, the choice is left to the individual, and sometimes one brother prefers to use the mother's name, the other the father's; such cases are not uncommon.

While referring to the peculiarities in "nomenclature," it is quite in keeping with the uniqueness of forms now to speak of the universal custom of naming the places of business, which in our own country are usually known by the name of the owner or firm. The bestowal of the name does not always suggest a comprehensive or clear discernment of the appropriateness. For instance, "La Elegante" might be a dilapidated building (not on Calle Obispo or O'Reilley, but some older, less frequented narrow street). La Favorita Dos Hermanos (Two Brothers), Las Niñas (The Children), La Mariposa (The Butterfly), El Fuego (The Fire), La Perla (The Pearl), are some of the favorite names. El Louvre and Le Bon Marche seem curiously at home in Havana. The streets named after heroes and martyrs are interspersed by such titles as "Dos de Mayo" (Second of May), to commemorate the death of the victims of Murat (Jacinto Ruis, Luis Daviz, and Pedro Velante, 1814), and others of like meaning, which seem sad and strange in a country so filled with new hopes, new life, and which is now making new history. There is a Spanish proverb which says, "El cielo y Tuelo es bueno el entretuelo malo" (the sky is good; the earth is good, only that which lies between is evil). In Cuba, where nature is so prodigal in her gifts, we will hope that man, who now has the opportunity, may develop the resources at hand and prove that personal excellence in goodness may be the connecting link between his beloved country and his God.

Some of the houses of the wealthy are very attractive, though the plan of construction in the house of Moorish design does not always command admiration from the exterior. The entrance is through a large and beautifully wrought iron gate and is guarded by a servano (watchman or porter) during the day. A glimpse within reveals the "patio," which is usually paved with marble, or beautiful designs in colored tiles, blue and white predominating. Flowers, ferns, palms, and tropical shrubs abound, the cool sound of the water playing in the fountain and the singing of birds enhancing the attractiveness. This is the rendezvous of the family and guests, and visitors are often received here. Usually all the rooms of the house open into this court.

In the daytime awnings and curtains are placed as protection from the sun. In some houses the custom of keeping the family carriage in the entrance hall still exists; the horse, passing through and beyond, occupies a stable in the rear of the kitchen. By this method a family and its belongings are housed under the one roof. Objections have

been raised against this practice by the sanitary committees of the cities. The style of cottage occupied by the laborer on the plantations is of another and I am sure equally antique date of architecture. The wonderful palm-tree supplies all the material needed and in days of extremity the fruit of the tree was eaten.

The peculiar characteristics of the palm is its gravity and disdain. It lacks the freshness and profusion of foliage which enhances the beauty of our shade-trees. "I love the palm-tree; it sets me dreaming, it reminds me of the East, of its magnificent landscapes, its melancholy ruins. It has an incomparable grace and majesty. Its mighty trunk, mounting, as it were, with a single bound towards the sky, has plainly served as the model for the graceful columns of the Egyptian temples and its drooping plumes for the type of the broad, hollow capital."

In the shopping localities of Calle Obispo and O'Reilley many very good shops are to be found, displaying their attractions with an abandon most alluring. Calle Obispo is very narrow, and on hot days awnings are stretched across the street, which gives it an Oriental appearance, like an Eastern bazaar. The feminine heart is made glad at the sight of muslins and silks of gaudy texture, fans of cobweb lace, linens of snowy whiteness, Panama and also hats of Parisian manipulators; fancy stores with the beautiful fine-drawn work and embroidery, done by the deft fingers of the *Cubanas*, and the jewelry stores, with their collection of curios, gathered during the war, antiques, and modern articles, all tend to entice the foreigner, not to mention the attractions for the man who loves his Havana, "*For a good cigar is a smoke*," and the various other trifles, such as *jai-a lai weapons*, machetas, and sombreros.

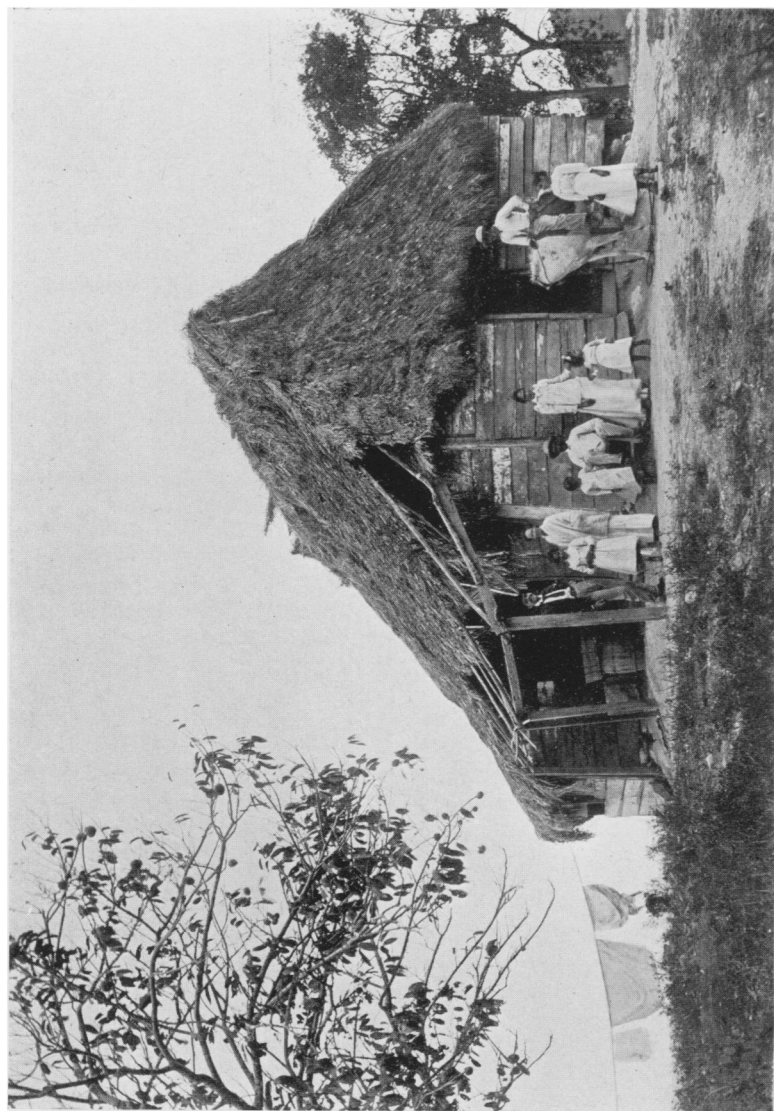
My confidence was once, and only once, betrayed, when I purchased an antique pewter teapot. "Muy antiquo" I was repeatedly assured (by the courteous salesman). When I afterwards discovered stamped on the bottom, "Meriden, Conn., 1876," I felt almost as humiliated as if it had been marked, "Made in Germany." I had not the heart to blame the man, as I was completely overcome by his exalted wish to oblige me.

The land of contrasts appeals in the total abandon during hours of ease or leisure, and the willingness to carry a lazy man's load when opportunity offers itself. The willingness of the cocher to accept a fare is only secured when he is told the distance is very short or he is engaged by the hour. Without the picturesque cocher Havana would seem quiet and placid, in a non-argumentative way.

Viewing a funeral procession, the gayety of the trappings of the horses, riders, and outriders does not impress one with the solemnity that usually characterizes a ceremony of this kind. Red and yellow (much gilt) are the colors worn, and form a strong contrast to the universally used black.



ROYAL PALMS, CUBA



THE "HOME" OF THE LABORER IN THE COUNTRY

A visit to the Cristobal Colon Cemetery, situated on a hill overlooking the city of Havana, repays the most casual of travellers. The locality is well selected, and shows great care combined with a certain amount of pride in its general appearance. Several handsome and historical monuments are found here, among which, that for beauty of design and proportion cannot be surpassed, is what is known as the "Bomberos'" (Firemen's) memorial. Passing from this cemetery to the old Havana Cemetery in San Juan de Dios, a suburb of Havana, the force of contrast is most striking, the latter being built in the old Spanish style, a wall several feet in thickness around the four sides of a square or vacant space, and several feet in height. In these thicknesses are several rows of long, narrow compartments, arched at the entrance and large enough to receive a single coffin. These compartments were leased. In the natural course of events, families ceased to pay the rent; the coffins and remains were then removed and buried in the vacant ground space. For many years this cemetery answered the purpose for which it was intended, but is now not used. The custom of leasing the ground for a burial-place is still in force.

In speaking of Cuba memory is pervaded with a strong and pleasing mental aroma of luscious fruits and magnificent flowers. A country where vegetation is never arrested has periods of rest, and at stated times the oranges, the pineapples, apricots, bananas, limes, and many more less-known fruits are in or out of season, which makes the variety so pleasing. The mangoes and oranges do not clash, and the aguacate holds court from June to October, a very prince of salads.

To be happy in Cuba it is necessary to know the people, to admire them for the many good qualities they possess as a nation and as individuals, combining the most excellent surviving characteristics of a race of people endowed with many noble qualities, men who built the Alhambra, who wrote "Don Quixote" and the poem of "The Cid," painted Madonnas, and planted Malaga. Wonderful opportunity has been the lot of the Spaniard in the past, and a wonderful opportunity lies *now* in the head, heart, and hand of the Cuban, who, fighting for, achieved liberty and with it self-government.

A paragraph in a letter written by the President of the United States to the President and Congress of the Republic of Cuba expresses the feeling evinced by all interested in the new republic: "I desire to express to you the sincere friendship and good-wishes of the United States, and our most earnest hope for the stability and success of your government, for the blessing of peace, justice, prosperity, and ordered freedom among your people, and for enduring friendship between the Republic of the United States and the Republic of Cuba."